

Overview of the Meadow Vista Vegetation Management Program Timberland Environmental Impact Report

Introduction

The Meadow Vista Vegetation Management Program Timberland Environmental Impact Report (PTEIR) was developed for the Meadow Vista community in Placer County, located about seven miles NE of Auburn. This unincorporated community has a population of 5,000 and covers 7,000 acres. The area is typified by rolling hills and meadows, with pine and oak woodlands.

The Placer County Resource Conservation District and the Placer Hills Fire Department brought forward the concept of a PTEIR for Meadow Vista. CDF and the Board of Forestry funded development of the PTEIR through a contract with the RCD. The purpose of the PTEIR is to complement fire safety goals of the Community Plan and the California Fire Plan by facilitating limited commercial timber removal as a part of vegetation management for fire safety. The concept is that landowners can remove limited amounts of commercial timber to help pay for the costs of hazard fuel reduction. With a PTEIR in place, landowners will have to file a simpler, lower cost program timberland harvesting plan (PTHP), rather than a full THP, to do commercial tree removal as a part of vegetation management.

Treatments Included in the PTEIR

Defensible Space The PTEIR allows for commercial removal of trees as a part of providing defensible space within 200 feet of structures. This distance extends 50 feet beyond that allowed under the 14 CCR §1038(d) exemption. Greater distance is provided in the PTEIR since, in some instances, such distance is needed to provide adequate fire safe clearance. The PTEIR specifies that this maximum 200-foot distance is to be reduced where such reduction will still provide an adequate level of defensible space. Defensible space treatments are restricted by the Fuel Break/Defensible Space silvicultural prescription defined by the Forest Practice Rules (14 CCR § 933.4(c)).

Shaded Fuelbreaks The PTEIR provides for the creation of shaded fuel breaks in key locations designated by CDF or local fire protection agencies. Shaded fuel breaks are restricted by the Fuel Break/Defensible Space harvest prescription defined by the Forest Practice Rules.

Defensible Landscape The PTEIR provides this treatment for areas that do not fit under either of the above prescriptions. The concept is to reduce fuel loading, break up fuel continuity, and improve forest health in these areas. All harvest systems except clearcutting and group selection may be used under the Defensible Landscape treatment. When using permitted evenaged management prescriptions, there must remain at least 8 18-inch dbh or larger countable trees per acre. Where seed tree step or similar alternative prescriptions are used, at least twice the minimum number of leave trees specified in the Forest Practice Rules must be retained. A variety of size classes of vegetation must be left, while providing an adequate disruption of fuel continuity.

Key Environmental Issues

Air Quality Residents have expressed concern about smoke generated by burning of waste materials produced by vegetation management. Burning of slash and debris will be allowed only

if other methods of disposal are unavailable or prove infeasible, or when denial of burning would impose substantial economic loss. Any burning must comply with Placer County Air Pollution Control District regulations and CDF permit requirements.

Visual Impacts Residents have expressed concern about the visual impacts of loss of screening and removal of large trees. The PTEIR mitigates these impacts by restricting harvest methods to those that maintain at least a minimum amount of overstory trees, requiring retention of a variety of size class vegetation, and requiring clean-up of slash and debris.

Wildlife Residents have expressed concern over the potential wildlife impacts from implementation of the PTEIR. WHR analysis indicates that full implementation of the PTEIR on every parcel (a very unlikely outcome) would increase the habitat for 65% of the potential species in the area, reduce the habitat for 17% of the potential species, and not change the habitat for 17% of the potential species. Mitigations provided for biological resources, in addition to the Forest Practice Rules, include inspections for listed species, timing of treatments to avoid impacts on listed species and nesting birds, protection of rare natural communities, strict limitation of operations in WLPZs, and maintaining stand structure through limited silvicultural treatments.

CEQA Process

On April 10, 1998 a Notice of Preparation and Environmental Checklist were filed with the State Clearinghouse, beginning the process of PTEIR development. In addition, a public scoping meeting was held in Meadow Vista to inform the public about the process and receive public comments. Written comments were submitted by the Placer County Water Agency, Department of Fish and Game, Department of Transportation, Placer County, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and one local resident.

Agency and public review of the draft PTEIR occurred between June 16 and July 30, 1999. During that period a public hearing, attended by approximately ten people, was held in the community of Meadow Vista. The PTEIR was discussed and oral comments were recorded. Two public agencies (CDFG and Placer County Planning Department) and two individuals submitted written comments. Oral and written comments have been addressed in the final PTEIR.

The PTEIR process identified several resource areas where potentially significant impacts to the environment could occur due to future operations under this PTEIR. The PTEIR discusses these potential impacts, develops mitigations, and finds that all potential impacts will be reduced to a level of less than significant when the appropriate mitigations are applied.

CDF Director Andrea Tuttle approved the PTEIR in July 2000.